

SEMICONDUCTOR LASER DEVICE AND DRIVE CONTROL METHOD FOR A
SEMICONDUCTOR LASER DEVICE

BACKGROUND OF THE INVENTION

Field of the Invention

[0001] The present invention relates to a technology used in a light source for exciting an optical fiber amplifier and capable of producing a laser beam of a stable wavelength.

Description of the Background

[0002] Conventionally, semiconductor laser devices producing laser beams as signal lights use a distribution feedback (DFB) type laser element incorporating a diffraction grating.

Since a signal light is being produced, a wavelength of the signal light must be highly precise (e.g., ± 0.1 nm or less). However, the wavelength of the signal light of such semiconductor laser devices are typically not stable. Accordingly, such laser devices require the use of a "wavelength lock device." The wavelength lock device controls and monitors the wavelength of the laser beam produced by the laser device. The wavelength lock device controls the wavelength of the laser beam through feedback so that the monitored wavelength may be a desired wavelength, thereby producing a laser beam of a stable wavelength.

[0003] The wavelength lock device described above requires a large, complicated, and expensive optical system and control unit to monitor the wavelength of produced laser beam. Accordingly, it is difficult to reduce the size, weight, and cost of the semiconductor laser device.

[0004] Semiconductor laser devices producing laser beams as light sources for exciting

Raman amplifiers also use a DFB type laser element incorporating a diffraction grating. However, the driving current applied to the semiconductor laser device for producing a laser beam as signal light is a small value (e.g., about 80 mA) as compared to the DFB laser element incorporating a diffraction grating used as a light source for exciting a Raman amplifier (e.g., the driving current increases about 1000 mA and a high output laser beam of over 300 mW is emitted). Along with the increase in the driving current of such Raman amplifier light sources, the temperature of an active layer of the laser device increases and the oscillation wavelength tends to shift to the longer wavelength side. Additionally, the semiconductor laser devices used as a light source for exciting a Raman amplifier require a wavelength control at a precision of about ± 0.5 nm. The above factors render the use of conventional semiconductor laser devices used as a light source for exciting a Raman amplifier.

[0005] Generally, in the light source for exciting a Raman amplifier, a flat amplification characteristic is obtained by controlling the oscillation wavelength at a specific wavelength interval between plural semiconductor laser devices, but the amplification factor varies depending on whether the light input of the object of control is small or large, and hence it has been attempted to increase or decrease the light output of the Raman amplifier exciting light source depending on the magnitude of the light input. In other words, the driving current of the Raman amplifier exciting light source is increased or decreased in order to control the oscillation wavelength and thereby produce a flat amplification characteristic. As a result, as mentioned above, the temperature of the active layer changes and the oscillation wavelength shifts, and a flat amplification characteristic cannot be obtained.

SUMMARY OF THE INVENTION

[0006] The present invention provides a semiconductor laser device and a drive control method for a semiconductor laser device capable of obtaining a stable oscillation wavelength, in a simple, small and inexpensive structure, without requiring waveform monitor, regardless of a significant increase or decrease in driving current.

[0007] The present invention advantageously provides a semiconductor laser device including a semiconductor laser element, a temperature measuring element configured to measure a temperature, and a temperature regulating unit having the semiconductor laser element and the temperature measuring element thermally connected thereto. The semiconductor laser device also includes a current detecting unit configured to detect a driving current applied to the semiconductor laser element. Further, the semiconductor laser device includes a control unit configured to control the temperature regulating unit using a control function to achieve a substantially constant wavelength output from the semiconductor laser element. The control function defines a relationship between a predetermined driving current and a predetermined temperature. The control unit is configured to control the temperature regulating unit such that the temperature detected by the temperature measuring element substantially equals the predetermined temperature corresponding to the detected driving current as defined by the control function.

[0008] Additionally, the present invention advantageously provides a semiconductor laser device including a semiconductor laser element, a temperature measuring element configured to measure a temperature, and a temperature regulating unit having the semiconductor element and the temperature measuring element thermally connected thereto. The semiconductor laser device also includes a means for detecting a driving current applied to the semiconductor laser element. The semiconductor laser device further includes a means

for controlling the temperature regulating unit using a control function to achieve a substantially constant wavelength output from the semiconductor laser element.

[0009] The present invention further advantageously provides a drive control method for a semiconductor laser device. The method includes the step of determining a control function defined as a relationship between a predetermined driving current and a predetermined temperature to achieve a substantially constant wavelength output from a semiconductor laser element of the semiconductor laser device. The method further includes a step of detecting a driving current applied to the semiconductor laser element. Further, the method includes controlling a temperature regulating unit such that a temperature detected by a temperature measuring element substantially equals the predetermined temperature corresponding to the detected driving current as defined by the control function. In this method, the semiconductor laser element and the temperature measuring element are thermally connected to the temperature regulating unit.

[0010] Additionally, the present invention advantageously provides a drive control method for a semiconductor laser device for controlling a temperature of a semiconductor laser element on a basis of a temperature detected by a temperature measuring element disposed near the semiconductor laser element thereby controlling a wavelength of a laser beam oscillated by the semiconductor laser element. The method includes the steps of detecting a driving current applied to the semiconductor laser element, and acquiring a relationship between driving current and temperature at which the wavelength of the laser beam oscillated by the semiconductor laser element is generally constant. The method further includes the step of controlling the temperature of the semiconductor laser element so that the detected temperature of the semiconductor laser element and the corresponding detected driving current satisfy the acquired relationship.

[0011] Furthermore, the present invention advantageously provides a drive control method for a semiconductor laser device for controlling a temperature of a semiconductor laser element on a basis of a temperature detected by a temperature measuring element disposed near the semiconductor laser element thereby controlling a wavelength of a laser beam oscillated by the semiconductor laser element. The method includes the steps of detecting a driving current applied to the semiconductor laser element, and acquiring a plurality of relationships between driving current and temperature in which the wavelength of the laser beam oscillated by the semiconductor laser element is generally constant. The method also includes the steps of setting a desired wavelength, and changing from a present relationship to a new relationship corresponding to the desired wavelength. Further, the method includes a step of controlling a temperature of the semiconductor laser element so that the detected temperature and the corresponding detected driving current satisfy the new relationship.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

[0012] A more complete appreciation of the invention and many of the attendant advantages thereof will become readily apparent with reference to the following detailed description, particularly when considered in conjunction with the accompanying drawings, in which:

[0013] Figure 1 is a diagram showing a first embodiment of a semiconductor laser device according to the present invention;

[0014] Figure 2 is a graph showing examples of control function stored in a storage unit of a temperature controller shown in Figure 1;

[0015] Figure 3 is a graph showing driving current dependence of oscillation waveform in the semiconductor laser device shown in Figure 1;

[0016] Figure 4 is a graph showing an example of quadratic function as a control function to be stored in the storage unit of the temperature controller shown in Figure 1;

[0017] Figure 5 is a graph showing another example of a control function stored in the storage unit of the temperature controller shown in Figure 1;

[0018] Figure 6 is a flowchart showing a drive control method for a semiconductor laser device shown in Figure 1;

[0019] Figure 7 is a diagram showing a second embodiment of a semiconductor laser device according to the present invention;

[0020] Figure 8 is a graph showing examples of a control function group stored in a storage unit of a temperature controller shown in Figure 7;

[0021] Figure 9 is a flowchart showing a drive control method for a semiconductor laser device shown in Figure 7; and

[0022] Figures 10A and 10B are graphs showing a correction method of gain characteristic by wavelength control in the semiconductor laser device shown in Figure 7 used as an exciting light source for a Raman amplifier.

DESCRIPTION OF THE PREFERRED EMBODIMENTS

[0023] Embodiments of the semiconductor laser device and drive control method for a semiconductor laser device according to the present invention will be explained in detail below.

[0024] Figure 1 is a diagram showing a first embodiment of a semiconductor laser device according to the present invention. As depicted in Figure 1, the semiconductor laser device 1 has a semiconductor laser element 2 disposed on a thin metal film 4a that is provided on an upper surface of a sub-mount 4. When a driving current I_{op} is applied to the semiconductor

laser element 2, the semiconductor laser element 2 oscillates and produces a laser beam of desired wavelength from an active layer 3. The semiconductor laser element 2 has a diffraction grating 3a provided near the active layer 3. The diffraction grating 3a is constructed to select a desired wavelength from the laser beam produced by the active layer 3.

[0025] The driving current I_{op} is supplied to a variable power source 10, and is detected by a current detector 11. The driving current I_{op} detected by the current detector 11 is sent into a temperature controller 12.

[0026] The semiconductor laser device 1 includes a temperature measuring element 5 such as, for example, a thermistor or the like. The temperature measuring element 5 is disposed on a thin metal film 6a that is provided on an upper surface of a sub-mount 6. The temperature measuring element 5 is disposed near the semiconductor laser element 2. The temperature measuring element 5 is connected to the temperature controller 12, and the temperature controller 12 acquires temperature T_s measured by the temperature measuring element 5.

[0027] The sub-mount 4 is made of heat conducting and electrically insulating material such as, for example, AlN or diamond. The sub-mount 6 is made of heat conducting and electrically insulating material such as, for example, AlN. The sub-mounts 4, 6 are disposed on a carrier 7 that is made of a heat and electrically conducting material such as, for example, CuW. The carrier 7 is disposed on a base 8 that is made of a heat and electrically conducting material. The semiconductor laser device 1 includes a temperature regulating unit such as, for example a Peltier device 9, that is disposed beneath the base 8. The base 8 is preferably made of a material (for example, CuW) having the small difference of a thermal expansion coefficient between a thermal expansion coefficient of the base 8 and a thermal expansion coefficient of an upper layer of the Peltier device 9 upon which the base is mounted, whereby

the base 8 acts as a buffer. The carrier 7 acts as the support of the semiconductor laser 2.

And the base 8 acts as the support of the parts such as, for example, a photo detector or a lens in a module.

[0028] The temperature controller 12 includes a storage device or storage unit 13 for storing a control function described below. The driving current I_{op} detected by the current detector 11 is entered in the control function. Based upon the temperature indicated by the control function as corresponding to the detected driving current I_{op} , the current direction and current amount of the current I_c to the Peltier device 9 is controlled by the temperature controller 12 so that the temperature T_s detected by the temperature measuring element 5 is generally equal to the temperature indicated by the control function. That is, the temperature controller 12 controls the current feeding direction and feeding amount into the Peltier device 9 thereby controlling a cooling/heating operation of the Peltier device 9, and the temperature is controlled so that the detected temperature of the temperature measuring element 5 may be a value corresponding to the control function.

[0029] The control function is explained in detail below. Figure 2 is a graph showing examples of control functions FS1, FS2, and FS3 stored in the storage unit 13 of the temperature controller 12. In Figure 2, line L1 refers to a case where the temperature T_s detected by the temperature measuring element 5 is controlled to be constant (e.g. at 25°C) regardless of any increase or decrease in the driving current I_{op} . By contrast, the first embodiment of the present invention includes control functions FS1, FS2, and FS3 in which the temperature T_s varies along a downwardly sloping line as the driving current I_{op} decreases. Note that the temperature T_s of the temperature measuring element 5 is controlled such that the temperature T_j of the active layer 3 (see line L2) remains constant regardless of the driving current I_{op} , as is reflected by the fact that a constant oscillating wavelength is

maintained. The control functions FS1, FS2, and FS3 are used to control the Peltier device 9 so that when the detected value of the driving current I_{op} is entered into the control function (for example, FS2), the temperature corresponding to the detected driving current I_{op} as defined in the control function is generally equivalent to the temperature T_s detected by the temperature measuring element 5.

[0030] In order to ensure that the temperature T_s detected by the temperature measuring element 5 is equal to the temperature defined by the control function, the temperature controller 12 changes the current direction and current amount of the current I_c in the Peltier device 9, thereby controlling the temperature T_s in a manner so as to maintain the temperature T_j of the active layer 3 at a constant level. Similarly, when the control function FS1 or FS3 is being used, the temperature T_s is controlled so as to maintain the relation of the control function FS1 or FS3, respectively.

[0031] The control functions FS1, FS2, and FS3 are defined in a driving range I_a of the driving current I_{op} and are defined so as to provide a generally constant wavelength. It should be noted that the downward slope of the various control functions as the driving current I_{op} is increased is a result of the increased cooling being performed by the Peltier device 9 at higher driving currents needed to maintain the temperature T_j of the active layer 3 at a constant level I_{op} , as is reflected by the fact that a constant oscillating wavelength is maintained. As the driving current I_{op} is increased, the amount of heat produced by the semiconductor laser element 2 will also increase, and accordingly, the Peltier device 9 will need to pump a larger amount of heat away from the semiconductor laser element 2 to maintain a constant temperature T_j at the active layer 3 and a constant output wavelength. Since the semiconductor laser element 2 and the temperature measuring element 5 are mounted on separate sub-mounts that are each thermally connected to the Peltier device 9, the

Peltier device 9 will also remove heat from the temperature measuring element, thereby resulting in a decrease in temperature T_s shown in the downward slope of the various control functions with increasing driving current I_{op} .

[0032] The control function FS1 is defined to provide a constant oscillating wavelength of $\lambda_1 = 1500.1$ nm. The control function FS1 was determined by measuring a temperature T_s of 25°C when the driving current I_{op} is 1200 mA, and then measuring a temperature T_s of 56°C when the driving current I_{op} is 100 mA. The control function FS1 is then determined by drawing a straight line linking coordinate CP1 (at a temperature of 25°C and a driving current I_{op} of 1200 mA) and coordinate CP1' (at a temperature of 56°C and a driving current I_{op} of 100 mA).

[0033] The control function FS2 is defined to provide a constant oscillating wavelength of $\lambda_2 = 1499$ nm. The control function FS2 was determined by measuring a temperature T_{s1} of 25°C when the driving current I_{op} is 900 mA, and then measuring a temperature T_{s2} of 48°C when the driving current I_{op} is 100 mA. The control function FS2 is then determined by drawing a straight line linking coordinate CP2 (at a temperature T_{s1} of 25°C and a driving current I_{op} of 900 mA) and coordinate CP2' (at a temperature T_{s2} of 48°C and a driving current I_{op} of 100 mA).

[0034] Furthermore, the control function FS3 is defined to provide a constant oscillating wavelength of $\lambda_3 = 1497.7$ nm. The control function FS3 was determined by measuring a temperature of 25°C when the driving current I_{op} is 300 mA, and then measuring a temperature of 7°C when the driving current I_{op} is 900 mA. The control function FS3 is then determined by drawing a straight line linking coordinate CP3 (at a temperature of 25°C and a driving current I_{op} of 300 mA) and coordinate CP3' (at a temperature of 7°C and a driving current I_{op} of 900 mA).

[0035] The control functions are determined by observing the temperature T_s at which a given driving current produces a constant wavelength output from the semiconductor laser device 1. While the actual temperature T_j of the active layer 3 cannot be precisely measured, it is safe to assume that the temperature T_j remains constant if the output wavelength of the semiconductor laser element 2 remains constant. Accordingly, the output wavelength is observed in order to determine the proper temperature T_s at the temperature measuring element 5 that will produce a constant output wavelength. While the actual temperature T_j of the active layer 3 is not measured, by instead measuring the output wavelength of the laser beam, a result of an equivalent accuracy is achieved by the first embodiment of the present invention.

[0036] Note that the control functions of a given structural configuration of a semiconductor laser device may differ from control functions FS1, FS2, and FS3 of the first embodiment discussed herein. If the structural configuration of the semiconductor laser device (for example, the materials used to construct the device, the locations of various features, or the addition or subtraction of various features) is modified, then the control function required to maintain a constant temperature T_j at the active layer may differ from those described herein. For any given structural configuration of semiconductor laser device, the control functions applicable to that device can be obtained using the method described above with respect to the control functions FS1, FS2, and FS3.

[0037] One or more of the control functions FS1, FS2, and FS3 is stored in the storage unit 13. The temperature controller 12 accesses the control functions within the storage unit 13 in order to drive and control the Peltier device 9 so that the detected temperature T_s may satisfy the control function stored in the storage unit 13 on the basis of the driving current I_{op} detected by the current detector 11 and the temperature T_s detected by the temperature

measuring unit 5. For example, by controlling the temperature T_s using the control function FS2, the oscillation wavelength is constant at wavelength λ_2 . Therefore, the oscillation wavelength does not jump due to shifting of the oscillation wavelength, whereby a dynamic stability of oscillation wavelength is obtained. Similarly, the wavelength can be controlled at constant oscillation wavelengths λ_1 , λ_3 by controlling the temperature on the basis of the control functions FS1 and FS3.

[0038] Figure 3 is a graph showing a wavelength control result on the basis of control functions FS1, FS2, and FS3. In Figure 3, line L3 shows changes of oscillation wavelength λ in the case where the temperature T_s detected by the temperature measuring element 5 is controlled to be constant regardless of any increase or decrease in the driving current I_{op} , as was the case for line L1 in Figure 2 (e.g., in a pumping laser without temperature control). For line L3, as the driving current I_{op} increases from 100 mA to 1200 mA, the wavelength λ is shifted to the longer wavelength side by about 3 nm, from about 1497 nm to about 1500nm. By contrast, in the present invention using a temperature control according to control functions FS1, FS2, and FS3, if the driving current I_{op} is increased from 100 mA to 1200 mA, then constant oscillation wavelengths λ_1 , λ_2 , and λ_3 , respectively, are maintained as represented by wavelength characteristic curves FT1, FT2, and FT3, respectively. For example, in the case where temperature control is performed on the basis of the control function FS2, a precision of $\lambda_2 \pm 0.5$ nm is maintained, thereby producing a laser beam having a stable wavelength. (The black square marks and black diamond marks shown in Figure 2 and Figure 3 are measured values.)

[0039] While the measurement of the wavelength output from the semiconductor laser device was needed to initially define the control functions for the structural configuration described herein, the wavelength of the final products need not monitored during operation of

the semiconductor laser devices. Since the wavelength is not monitored, an optical system is not needed for the semiconductor laser device, and inexpensive semiconductor laser device can be realized. Accordingly, the structure of the semiconductor laser device of the present invention is simple and small.

[0040] While the control functions FS1, FS2, and FS3 shown in Figure 2 are linear functions, alternatively a quadratic control function FS11 shown in Figure 4 can be used if desired. Generally, the temperature rise of the active layer 3 due to an increase in the driving current I_{op} is divided into a power consumed by laser oscillation, and a power consumed by resistance of the active layer 3, the power consumed by resistance of the active layer 3 is the product of this resistance multiplied by the square of the driving current I_{op} , and hence the temperature change of the active layer 3 relating to the driving current I_{op} is considered to change in a square. That is, supposing the built-in voltage of the active layer 3 to be V_0 and the series resistance of the laser element of the active layer 3 to be R , when the driving current I_{op} of driving voltage is applied to the semiconductor laser device, the total power W is expressed as follows:

$$[0041] \quad W = I_{op} \cdot V$$

$$[0042] \quad W = (V_0 + R \cdot I_{op}) \cdot I_{op}$$

$$[0043] \quad W = V_0 I_{op} + I_{op}^2 R$$

[0044] Since 80 to 90% of this total power W is changed to Joule heat, the temperature change of the active layer 3 is a quadratic function of the driving current I_{op} . Therefore, by using the control function FS11 of quadratic function, the oscillation wavelength may be further stabilized.

[0045] Furthermore, as shown in Figure 5, the control function can be an arbitrary control function, such as the control function FS (I_{op}). Generally, since the characteristic curve of

laser oscillation efficiency varies significantly depending on the structure or operation of the semiconductor laser device 1, the control function FS (Iop) can be defined corresponding to a specific type of semiconductor laser device. In this case, the control function FS (Iop) of the semiconductor laser device can be determined by measuring point P1 at the driving current I α and at the detected temperature T α of the temperature measuring element. Additional points can be added to increase the accuracy of the control function FS (Iop), such as point P2.

Using this process, a control function of higher precision is obtained.

[0046] Additionally, it is noted that in an alternative embodiment the temperature control function FS1, FS2, and FS3 shown in Figure 2 can be corrected using the wavelength deviations shown in the wavelength characteristic curves FT1, FT2, and FT3, respectively, shown in Figure 3. In other words, the control functions FS1, FS2, and FS3 can be modified to produce wavelength characteristic curves FT1, FT2, and FT3, respectively, that are flat (i.e. provide a constant and precise output wavelength regardless of the driving current Iop).

[0047] Referring to the flowchart in Figure 6, a drive control method for a semiconductor laser device of the first embodiment of the invention is explained below.

[0048] The drive control method begins with a step S101 in which the control function is determined. For example, step S101 is performed by applying a driving current I α within a driving range Ia to the semiconductor laser device 1. Then, the temperature T α of the temperature detecting element 5 is detected to determine point P1. Then, a driving current I β is applied to the semiconductor laser device 1, and a temperature T β of the temperature detecting element 5 is detected to determine point P2. And then, a straight line is linking the two points P1 and P2 is determined, thereby providing the control function. When acquiring the points P1 and P2, the Peltier device 9 is controlled so that the oscillation wavelength remains constant. Once the control function is determined, the method proceeds with a step

S102 of storing the control function in the storage unit 13.

[0049] Steps S101 and S102 are performed during the manufacturing stages of the semiconductor laser device 1. The control function determined for a specific structural configuration of a semiconductor laser device should be sufficiently accurate for use with all semiconductor laser devices manufactured with the same structural configuration. Therefore, it is generally not necessary to perform this calibration technique for each individual semiconductor laser device manufactured. However, in order to ensure the highest degree of accuracy for the semiconductor laser devices, it is desirable to calibrate each individual laser device, and it may also be desirable to recalibrate the laser device after prolonged usage.

[0050] Once the semiconductor laser device 1 is utilized in an operational setting, the method includes a step S103 of detecting the driving current I_{op} input to the semiconductor laser device 1. For example, the temperature controller 12 detects the driving current I_{op} detected by the current detector 11.

[0051] Once the driving current I_{op} is detected, the method includes a step S104 of controlling the temperature of the system based upon the control function. For example, the detected driving current I_{op} is compared by the temperature controller 12 to the control function stored in the storage unit 13. The temperature controller 12 determines (based upon the detected driving current I_{op} and the control function) the theoretical temperature at which the temperature measuring element 5 should be at in order to produce the desired output wavelength. Accordingly, the temperature controller 12 controls the Peltier device 9 such that the detected temperature T_s of the temperature measuring element 5 equals the theoretical temperature derived from the control function. Steps S103 and S104 are repeated during the operation of the semiconductor laser device 1 in order to ensure that the oscillation wavelength output from the laser device 1 remains constant, even if the driving current I_{op} is

changed.

[0052] It is noted that the semiconductor laser element 2 of the present invention shown in Figure 1 can be used as a Raman amplifier exciting light source by oscillating a plurality of longitudinal modes by providing the diffraction grating 3a with a drift of wavelength selection. (See Japanese Patent Application No. 2000-323118.) Additionally, the present invention can be also used in other optical fiber amplifier exciting light sources such as, for example, EDFA exciting light sources and general semiconductor laser elements.

[0053] In particular, when plural semiconductor laser devices 1 are used as a Raman amplifier exciting light source, the oscillation wavelength is not changed regardless of an increase or a decrease in driving current Iop. In such Raman amplifier exciting light sources, the wavelength dependence of amplification gain by combination of semiconductor laser devices 1 maintains the flatness, so that a favorable amplification characteristic may be maintained.

[0054] In the above description of the first embodiment, one control function is stored in the storage unit 13, and the Peltier device 9 is driven and controlled to achieve a detected temperature Ts satisfying this control function. However, it is possible to store and utilize plural control functions corresponding to plural oscillation wavelengths, whereby the wavelength of the laser beam is controlled in a precise and effective manner. One such embodiment is described below as a second embodiment of the present invention.

[0055] Figure 7 is a diagram showing a second embodiment of a semiconductor laser device according to the present invention. In Figure 7, a temperature controller 22 corresponds to the temperature controller 12 of the first embodiment, and includes a storage unit 23 and a wavelength setting unit 24. The storage unit 23 generally corresponds to the storage unit 13 of the first embodiment, but is different from the storage unit 13 in that the

storage unit 23 holds plural control functions, such as a control function group FSS. In the second embodiment, a desired wavelength to be controlled is set and entered in the wavelength setting unit 24.

[0056] The temperature controller 22 accesses a control function from the storage unit 23 corresponding to the wavelength set by the wavelength setting unit 24, and changes the control function of the object of control to this control function. The temperature controller 22 then controls the temperature to satisfy this changed control function. In Figure 8, for example, assuming the present control function is control function FS2, if the wavelength set by the wavelength setting unit 24 is λ_1 , the temperature controller 22 changes from the present control function FS2 to control function FS1, and controls the temperature according to the control function FS1 thereafter. As a result, since the driving current I_{op} remains constant (e.g. at 500 mA in Figure 8), and since the temperature is controlled so that the detected temperature T_s is shifted higher by a temperature change of ΔT_1 (e.g., 10°C), then the output wavelength of the laser beam shifts from a wavelength of λ_2 to a wavelength of λ_1 . Similarly, when the wavelength is set by the wavelength setting unit 24 as wavelength λ_3 , the temperature controller 22 changes from the present control function FS2 to control function FS3. As a result, since the driving current I_{op} remains constant (e.g., at 1000 mA in Figure 8), and since the temperature is controlled so that the detected temperature T_s is shifted lower by a temperature change of ΔT_2 (e.g., 18°C), then the output wavelength of the laser beam shifts from a wavelength of λ_2 to a wavelength of λ_3 . If the driving current I_{op} is changed, then the temperature is controlled according to the control function presently in use.

[0057] The temperature control processing by the temperature controller 22 of the second embodiment will be explained below with reference to the flowchart shown in Figure 9. The process begins with a step S201 that includes the setting and storing (or holding) of the

control function group FSS in the storage unit 23. Then the desired oscillation wavelength λ is set and the wavelength is input to the temperature controller 22 in a step S202. Then, in step S203, the temperature controller 22 shifts the temperature control to the control function corresponding to the oscillation waveform set and input in step S202, and this process is terminated.

[0058] The fine wavelength control in the second embodiment can be applied to an exciting light source used, for example, in a Raman amplifier. Figure 10A provides graphs relating to a Raman amplifier of the semiconductor laser device according to the present invention. Figure 10A depicts a plurality of longitudinal oscillation modes in each of the oscillation wavelength spectra LA1, LA2 of each exciting light source. Figure 10B depicts the gain characteristic of the Raman amplifier that appears at the wavelength side of about 100 nm longer, which appears as gain characteristics LB1, LB2 corresponding to the exciting light sources. Therefore, as shown in Figure 10B, the combined gain characteristic of the gain characteristics LB1, LB2 is expressed by characteristic LC. However, since the gain characteristic is required to be flat over the wavelength band of the entered lights to be amplified, the gain characteristic LC must be further flattened.

[0059] In such a case, the fine wavelength control described above can be utilized to flatten the gain characteristic LC. For example, when the oscillation wavelength spectrum LA2 is shifted to the shorter wavelength side, the corresponding gain characteristic is shifted to the shorter wavelength side, so that the recessed portion of the characteristic LC can be flattened and the gain characteristic LC' is achieved.

[0060] In the first and second embodiments, both the semiconductor laser element 2 and temperature measuring element 5 are disposed on the sub-mounts 4, 6 provided on the carrier 7. However, the present invention is not limited to this structural configuration.

Alternatively, the sub-mounts 4, 6 can be omitted such that the semiconductor laser element 2 and temperature measuring element 5 are disposed directly on the carrier 7. Alternatively, the sub-mounts 4, 6 can be integrated into a single sub-mount such that the semiconductor laser element 2 and temperature measuring element 5 are both disposed on the integrated sub-mount assembly. In these configurations, the heat conductivity between the temperature measuring element 5 and semiconductor laser 2 is enhanced, so that the temperature measuring element 5 may measure the temperature of the semiconductor laser element 2 quickly and accurately, thereby increasing the accuracy of the temperature control and wavelength control.

[0061] The present invention provides an advantageous semiconductor laser device in which a temperature control unit maintains a relationship between a driving current and a temperature detected by a temperature measuring element such that the wavelength of the laser beam oscillated by the semiconductor laser element remains generally constant. The temperature control unit controls a temperature regulating unit so that the detected temperature of the temperature measuring element corresponding to the value of the detected driving current satisfies this relationship. Therefore, the wavelength of the laser beam remains constant regardless of an increase or a decrease of the driving current. Accordingly, the driving current dependence of the oscillation wavelength issued from the semiconductor laser element can be eliminated, and a laser beam having a stable wavelength can be obtained in a simple, small and inexpensive structure.

[0062] Additionally, the present invention advantageously provides a temperature control unit that is utilized to maintain the relationship by controlling a temperature regulating unit so as to lower a detected temperature of a temperature measuring element along with an increase in the driving current detected by the current detecting unit. Therefore, the present invention

eliminates the need for monitoring the wavelength of the laser beam, thereby providing a laser beam of stable wavelength in a simple, small and inexpensive structure.

[0063] Furthermore, the semiconductor laser element of the present invention advantageously incorporates a diffraction grating and oscillates plural longitudinal modes, and therefore it can be used as a Raman amplifier exciting light source capable of presenting highly precise and stable gain characteristic.

[0064] Furthermore, the present invention advantageously includes a storage unit of a temperature control unit that holds the relationship discussed above. The temperature is controlled on the basis of this relationship so as to eliminate the dependence on the driving current of the oscillation wavelength in each semiconductor laser device. Therefore, precise temperature control corresponding to an individual semiconductor laser device can be realized.

[0065] Furthermore, the temperature control unit can be configured to shift from one relationship to another relationship corresponding to a desired wavelength entered and set by the setting unit. The temperature control unit can then shift to the desired wavelength by controlling the temperature regulating unit on the basis of the shifted relationship. Therefore, the present invention can provide fine wavelength and, when used as the Raman amplifier exciting light source, correction of gain characteristic such as flattening of gain characteristic can be performed by wavelength shifting.

[0066] Furthermore, the relationship is a control function common to plural semiconductor laser devices having similar structural configuration and operation, and is determined as a specific control function for a particular semiconductor laser device by setting of detected temperature corresponding to one or more driving currents. Therefore, the control functions corresponding to the individual semiconductor laser devices can be obtained easily and

precisely, so that the driving current dependence of the oscillation wavelength can be eliminated.

[0067] Furthermore, in an embodiment of the present invention the control function is a linear function of the detected temperature and the driving current so as to realize an easy temperature control. Therefore, the driving current dependence of the oscillation wavelength can be eliminated by a simple control.

[0068] Furthermore, in an embodiment of the present invention the control function is a quadratic function of the detected temperature and the driving current, corresponding to the power consumption in the active layer. Therefore, the driving current dependence of the oscillation wavelength can be eliminated effectively by a simple control.

[0069] According to the drive control method for a semiconductor laser device according to the invention, a relationship between the driving current and the temperature detected by the temperature measuring element in which the wavelength of the laser beam oscillated by the semiconductor laser element is almost constant is determined in a relationship acquiring step. Then, a change in the driving current applied to the semiconductor laser element is detected in a current detecting step. Then, the temperature of the semiconductor laser element is controlled repeatedly in a temperature controlling step so that the detected temperature of the temperature measuring element corresponding to the value of the driving current detected by the current detecting unit may satisfy the above relationship. Therefore, the driving current dependence of the oscillation wavelength issued from the semiconductor laser device can be eliminated, and a laser beam having a stable wavelength without shift of oscillation wavelength can be obtained in a simple, small and inexpensive structure.

[0070] According to a drive control method for the semiconductor laser device of an embodiment of the invention, a plurality of relations between the driving current and the

temperature detected by the temperature measuring element in which the wavelength of the laser beam oscillated by the semiconductor laser element is almost constant are determined in a relationship acquiring step. Then, a step of setting and entering a desired wavelength is performed, and a step of shifting the relationship from a present relationship to a desired relationship corresponding to a desired wavelength is performed. Then, a change in the driving current applied to the semiconductor laser element is detected, and the temperature of the semiconductor laser element is controlled so that the relationship shifted at the relation shifting step and the detected temperature corresponding to the driving current satisfy the relationship. Therefore, fine wavelength control is precisely performed and, when used as a Raman amplifier exciting light source, correction of gain characteristic such as flattening of gain characteristic is performed by wavelength shifting.

[0071] It should be noted that the exemplary embodiments depicted and described herein set forth the preferred embodiments of the present invention, and are not meant to limit the scope of the claims hereto in any way.

[0072] Numerous modifications and variations of the present invention are possible in light of the above teachings. It is therefore to be understood that, within the scope of the appended claims, the invention may be practiced otherwise than as specifically described herein.